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## *The Holocaust in Hungary in Contexts. New Perspectives and Research Results*

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Special Editor of the Thematic Issue

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Kata Bohus

## Not a Jewish Question?

### The Holocaust in Hungary in the Press and Propaganda of the Kádár Regime during the Trial of Adolf Eichmann

In this paper, I examine the trial of Adolf Eichmann, portrayals of the trial in the contemporaneous Hungarian press, and the effects of the trial and the coverage on the formation of Holocaust memory in communist Hungary. The trial presented a problem for communist propaganda because it highlighted the destruction of Jews as the worst crime of the Nazi regime. While communist ideology's anti-fascism defined its stance as "anti-anti-Semitic," the Marxist-Leninist interpretation of World War II as a conflict between two opposing, ideologically defined camps (fascists and anti-fascists) made it difficult to accommodate the idea of non-political victimhood, e.g. the destruction of Jews on the basis of racist ideas and not because of their political commitments. Moreover, because of Eichmann's wartime mission in Hungary, it was clear that the trial would feature a great deal of discussion about his activities there. Therefore, the Hungarian Kádár regime devoted considerable attention to the event, both within the Party and in the press. The analysis concentrates on two aspects: what did the highest echelons of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party intend to emphasize in the Hungarian coverage of the trial and what kinds of interpretations actually appeared in the press. In the end, the party's political goals were only partially achieved. Control over newspapers guaranteed that certain key propaganda themes were included rather than ensuring that other narratives would be excluded. I argue that, while the Kádár regime in Hungary did not intend to emphasize the Jewish catastrophe and certainly did not seek to draw attention to its Hungarian chapter, as a consequence of the Eichmann trial there nevertheless emerged a narrative of the Hungarian Holocaust. Through various organs of the press, this narrative found public expression. Though this Holocaust narrative can be considered ideologically loaded and distorted, some of its elements continue to preoccupy historians who study the period today.

Keywords: Adolf Eichmann, communism in Hungary, Holocaust memory, communist press and propaganda

Adolf Eichmann, a former Nazi *SS-Obersturmbannführer* (Lieutenant Colonel) was captured by Israeli secret agents in Buenos Aires, Argentina on May 11, 1960. He was subsequently transported to Israel, where he would stand trial, indicted on 15 criminal charges, including crimes against humanity, crimes against the Jewish people and membership in a hostile organization (SD, *Sicherheitsdienst des*

*Reichsführers SS*) during the period of Nazi rule in Germany. His trial began in Jerusalem on April 11, 1961. He was pronounced guilty on December 11 and executed in the spring of 1962.

Many historians have argued that the Eichmann trial signalled a defining moment in (if not the real beginning of) Holocaust memory. David Cesarani noted that “the capture, trial and execution of Adolf Eichmann [...] changed forever perceptions of the Nazi persecution and mass murder of the Jews.”<sup>1</sup> Michael Rothberg went so far as to state that “the Eichmann trial brought the Nazi genocide of European Jews into the public sphere for the first time as a discrete event on an international scale.”<sup>2</sup> In addition to the trial, Hannah Arendt’s iconic articles in the *New Yorker* magazine—later turned into the book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*—started the global scholarly debate about the character of Adolf Eichmann, the working logic of the totalitarian state, and individual responsibility in its operation.<sup>3</sup>

At Adolf Eichmann’s trial, it was clear that there would be a lot of discussion about his activities in Hungary during World War II. Arriving to Hungary in the footsteps of the invading German troops, *Sondereinsatzkommando Eichmann*’s main task was to arrange, with the cooperation of local authorities, the deportation of the largest remaining Jewish population in Eastern Europe. The deportation of over 400,000 people to Auschwitz-Birkenau between mid-May and early July 1944 and the rapid mass extermination of their vast majority there during the last phase of the war helped turn the site into a central symbol of the Holocaust. The military situation in the summer of 1944 compelled Hungary’s Regent Miklós Horthy to halt deportations, and despite the large-scale violence instituted by the radically anti-Semitic Arrow Cross (*Nyilaskeresztes*) government of Ferenc Szálasi from October 1944 onwards, plans for the deportation of Budapest’s sizeable Jewish community were never implemented. There were close to 200,000 Jewish survivors in post-war Hungarian territories,<sup>4</sup> and despite its steady decline in numbers afterwards, the Hungarian Jewish community remained among the biggest in Central-Eastern Europe. Thus, for the Israeli Court that tried Eichmann, it was almost impossible to find survivor witnesses who had been

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1 David Cesarani, ed., *After Eichmann. Collective Memory and the Holocaust after 1961* (London–New York: Routledge, 2005), 1.

2 Michael Rothberg, “Beyond Eichmann: Rethinking the emergence of Holocaust memory,” in *History and Theory* 46, no. 1 (2007): 74.

3 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1963).

4 Tamás Stark, “A magyar zsidóság a vészorszakban és a második világháború után,” in *Regio. Kisebbség, politika, társadalom* 4, no. 3 (1993): 140–51.

in contact with Eichmann during the war with the possible exception of those from Hungary.<sup>5</sup> For these reasons, the Hungarian Holocaust became the most important chapter of the Eichmann trial.

This paper examines the trial's effects on the formation of Holocaust memory in communist Hungary. While some academics assert that the memory of the Holocaust was completely suppressed in the Soviet Union<sup>6</sup> and its Eastern European communist counterparts,<sup>7</sup> others argue that it was normalized

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5 It must be noted that the Israeli court's choice of witnesses was strategic and influenced by politics. For details see: Hanna Yablonka, *The State of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann* (New York: Schocken, 2004), esp. 88–120. Thirteen witnesses of Hungarian origin testified during the trial. Pinhas (previously Fülöp) Freudiger, who had been the head of the Orthodox Jewish community in Budapest from 1939. After the German invasion, he was appointed to the Jewish Council of Budapest. He and his family escaped to Romania in August, 1944 and settled in Israel after the war. Dr. Alexander (previously Sándor) Bródy, a writer who was assigned to labor service during the war and served as the director of the Joint-funded National Hungarian Jewish Aid Action (*Országos Magyar Zsidó Segítő Akció, O.M.ZS.A.*) from 1944. He left Hungary in 1949 and settled in Brazil. Mrs. Elisheva (Erzsébet) Szenes, a Slovakian-born journalist who escaped to Budapest but was then captured by the SS and sent to Auschwitz. She survived and settled in Israel after the war. Margit Reich whose husband perished in Auschwitz. She lived in Givatayim, Israel at the time of the trial but her children remained in Hungary. Dr. Martin Földi, a lawyer who was taken to Auschwitz. He moved to Israel after the war. Ze'ev Sapir, who was born in the village of Dobradovo, near the town of Munkács. He was deported to Auschwitz and subsequently sent to the Jaworzno labor camp. After surviving the war, he emigrated to Israel and worked with Youth Aliyah as a youth leader and teacher. Avraham Gordon, who was a minor living in Budapest during the war, and was forced to work at Eichmann's villa in Buda. He was living in Israel at the time of the trial and worked at the Timna Copper Works. Dr. Tibor Ferencz, lawyer, who served as Prosecutor with the People's Prosecution Office (*Népbíróság*) after the war and was present at the trials of László Baký and László Endre. He moved to Israel in 1957. Joel Brand, who was born in Naszód, Transylvania but grew up in Germany. During the Second World War, he was a member of the Relief and Rescue Committee which helped Jews escape to Hungary in the initial years of the war. After Hungary's German occupation, the organization's main goal became to save Jewish lives. Brand emigrated to Israel and lived in Tel Aviv at the time of the trial. Hansi Brand, Joel Brand's wife, born in Budapest in 1912. She was also a member of the Relief and Rescue Committee. Moshe (Móse) Rosenberg was born in Hungary and served as the Chairman of the Jewish National Fund and also the member of the Relief and Rescue Committee. He left Hungary on the Kasztner train and consequently moved to Israel. Arye Zvi Breszlauer, lawyer, who was born in Vyšný Ridniczi, Eastern Slovakia, an area that had belonged to Hungary until 1918. During the war, he participated in the rescue operations of the Swiss Consulate in Budapest. Aviva Fleischmann, who was a hairdresser in Budapest during the war. Leslie Gordon, who was deported from Budapest to Kamianets-Podilskyi in 1941 and was living in Canada at the time of the trial.

6 See for example: William Korey, "Down History's Memory Hole: Soviet Treatment of the Holocaust," in *Present Tense* 10, no. 2 (1983): 53.

7 See for example: Randolph L. Braham, "Assault on Historical Memory: Hungarian Nationalists and the Holocaust," in *Hungary and the Holocaust: Confrontation with the Past*. Symposium Proceedings, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, 2001, esp. 51; Shari J. Cohen, *Politics without a Past: The Absence of History in Post-communist Nationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University

through presentations of the events as parts of a larger phenomenon.<sup>8</sup> The idea that the Holocaust in Hungary was a taboo topic in communist Hungary has been a persistent thesis in academia, but some researchers have recently started to reassess this claim.<sup>9</sup>

This paper argues that, while the Kádár regime in Hungary did not intend to emphasize the Jewish catastrophe and certainly not to draw attention to its Hungarian chapter of 1944, there nevertheless emerged, as a consequence of the Eichmann trial, a narrative of the Hungarian Holocaust. Through the various organs of the press, this narrative found public expression. Thus, the thesis according to which the Holocaust was taboo does not hold up to sustained scrutiny. Though this Holocaust narrative can be considered ideologically loaded and distorted, some of its elements—especially the question of Hungarian collaboration with Eichmann's *Sondereinsatzkommando* in the deportation of Hungarian Jews—continue to preoccupy historians who study the period today.

This paper approaches the subject from a comparative perspective, taking into account state policies and the coverage of the Eichmann trial in other bloc countries as well. The comparative perspective helps accentuate systemic (bloc-wide) and country-specific goals of the party, and thus separates the strength of general communist ideological determinants from local policy factors in the presentation of the Eichmann trial. The analysis concentrates on two aspects: what the highest echelons of communist parties *intended* to emphasize in the Hungarian interpretation of the trial, and what kind of interpretation *appeared* in the press. In the end, the party's political goals were only partially achieved. Control over newspapers simply guaranteed that certain key propaganda themes were included, rather than ensuring that other narratives would be excluded.

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Press, 1999), esp. 85–118 (on Czechoslovakia); Michael Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

8 Zvi Gitelman, "Politics and Historiography of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union," in *Bitter Legacy. Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. idem (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 14–42.

9 A detailed analysis of the period's memory politics can be found in Regina Fritz, *Nach Krieg und Judenmord. Ungarns Geschichtspolitik seit 1944* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012), 229–78. Dániel Véri has examined, in various publications and exhibitions, the memory of the Holocaust in Hungarian art during the communist period. See for example his *A halottak élen: Major János világa* (Budapest: MKE, 2013). Some of the contributions in Vera Surányi, ed., *Minarik, Sonnenschein és a többiek: zsidó sorsok magyar filmen* (Budapest: MZSKE–Szombat, 2001) show the presentation of the Holocaust in Hungarian movies between 1945 and 1989. Teri Szűcs has focused on the representation of the Holocaust in literature, see especially her book *A felejtés története – A Holokauszt tanúsága irodalmi művekben* (Budapest: Kalligram, 2011).

Owing to a variety of factors, a partial narrative of the Hungarian specificities of the Holocaust did surface in the media.

### *A Problem for the Bloc*

As the communist regimes aimed to offer an interpretation of World War II which would not only fit their contemporary Cold War narrative, but would also correspond to the principles of Marxism-Leninism, the Eichmann case presented a challenge to them. Communist doctrine interpreted World War II as the struggle between Fascism and anti-Fascism, but the proceedings of the trial focused first and foremost on Eichmann's (and more broadly Nazi Germany's) atrocities against Jews. That Jews were not targeted because of their political beliefs was hard to fit into the framework of the ideologically defined struggle put forward by the communists. The tension between these historical narratives posed a problem for all countries of the Eastern bloc on a systemic level.

Though there is no single coherent Marxist-Leninist theory of Fascism, it is possible to highlight some of the most important elements that Marxist thinkers and communist propagandists emphasized even well before World War II. Communist regimes were anti-fascist on an ideological basis, thus in their interpretation, World War II was first and foremost a fight between Fascism and anti-Fascism. During the interwar period, a number of Marxist theories described Fascism as a reactionary ideology supported by the petty bourgeoisie which aimed to crush the working class (which was opposed to capitalism).<sup>10</sup> In the 1930s, Bulgarian communist leader George Dimitrov saw Fascism as the terroristic dictatorship of monopoly capitalism,<sup>11</sup> while the official Comintern definition saw it as a tool of "finance capital" which aspired to create an organized mass basis.<sup>12</sup> This strictly materialistic definition remained the official interpretation in communist countries until 1989.

After the war, the maintenance of the anti-fascist narrative had several functions in Eastern Europe. First, it served as a reminder of the successful struggle of communists in general, and the Soviet Union in particular, against

10 David Beetham, ed., *Marxists in Face of Fascism: Writings by Marxists on Fascism from the Interwar Period* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), 197–204; Léon Trotsky, *The Struggle against Fascism in Germany* (London: Pathfinder, 1971), 155–56.

11 George Dimitrov, *Against Fascism and War* (New York: International Publishers, 1986), 2.

12 "Theses on Fascism, the War Danger and the Tasks of the Communist Parties," in *The Communist International: 1919–1943. Documents*, vol. 3, ed. Jane Degras (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), esp. 296.



Nazi Germany<sup>13</sup> which was viewed not only as a military victory, but also a moral one.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, anti-Fascism was used to legitimize post-war communist rule by presenting it as the only guarantee against the resurgence of Fascism.<sup>15</sup> Finally, the theoretical linkage between Fascism and capitalism served as a basis for attacks against Western European countries and the United States in the ideological battles of the Cold War. Communist regimes claimed that social oppression was not limited to Nazi Germany, but was inherent to all socio-economic structures based on capitalism. In the context of a struggle between Fascism and anti-Fascism, the persecution of Jews was never the primary focus of communist interpretations of the war.

The Eichmann trial posed another problem for “real socialist” states, in that Israel claimed the role of the main representative and articulator of Jewish interests. Each of the Eastern European communist countries still had Jewish communities (some larger, some smaller) living within its territory. That the most recent history of these communities would be interpreted through a framework defined by an Israeli court was highly undesirable for communist leaderships from a historical point of view. The editor of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union’s main newspaper, Pravda, talked candidly with Israeli diplomats at the time of the trial about Soviet unwillingness to cooperate openly on that basis. “We are not interested in strengthening the impression that Israel is the main defender of the Jewish people. The Red Army saved thousands of Jews”, he was quoted as having said.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the political dimension raised further issues for communist propaganda with regards to the trial. Especially since the Suez Crisis of 1956 and because of the increasingly Western orientation of its foreign policies, Israel was viewed as the “mainstay of Western imperialism” in the Middle East.<sup>17</sup> The country’s ever closer relations with West Germany since

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13 Nina Tumarkin, “The Great Patriotic War as myth and memory,” *European Review* 11, no. 4 (2003): 596.

14 Nati Cantorovich, “Soviet Reactions to the Eichmann Trial: Preliminary Investigations 1960–1965,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 35, no. 2 (2007): 106.

15 François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), esp. 396–437; Mark R. Thompson, “Reluctant revolutionaries: Anti-Fascism and the East German opposition” *German Politics* 8, no. 1 (1999): 43; James Mark, “Antifascism, the 1956 Revolution and the Politics of the Communist Autobiographies in Hungary 1944–2000,” *Europe–Asia Studies* 58, no. 8 (2006): 1209–40.

16 Avigdor Dagan, *Moscow and Jerusalem. Twenty years of relations between Israel and the Soviet Union* (London–New York–Toronto: Abelard-Schuman, 1970), 138–39.

17 Yosef Govrin, *Israeli–Soviet Relations 1953–1967. From Confrontation to Disruption* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 45.

the 1950s were described by communist propaganda as evidence of the Jewish state's clear pact with Communism's archenemy in Europe.<sup>18</sup> This situation, therefore, raised important practical questions for the whole bloc with regards to the trial. Communist states had to decide if they would collaborate with the Israeli court (for example, by providing it with documentation), and whether the authority of the Israeli court to pronounce judgment on Eichmann could or should be acknowledged at all, instead of insisting on the trial of Eichmann in Eastern Europe.

There were also certain country-specific problems that the capture of Adolf Eichmann and his trial presented for Eastern European leaders. A generic narrative of communists fighting a war against Fascism was especially inaccurate in the Hungarian context. As opposed to Czechoslovakia or Bulgaria, the home-bred communist movement in Hungary, which, according to this generic narrative, fought domestic "fascists," was weak and received little support from the population. As opposed to Poland, a country "without a Quisling and, in all of Nazi-controlled Europe, the place least likely to assist the German war effort,"<sup>19</sup> Hungary entered the war on the side of Nazi Germany and remained its ally despite the abortive attempt to switch sides in 1944. Thus, unlike Poland and Czechoslovakia, each of which produced considerable resistance movements during World War II, Hungary had only generated a weak and insignificant equivalent.<sup>20</sup> All of these inconvenient details made any narrative of a widespread popular struggle against Fascism during World War II particularly hard to substantiate, and the Eichmann trial threatened to highlight these contradictions.

Other bloc countries were wary of the impending trial for other reasons. The German Democratic Republic (GDR), as the socialist German state and "Victor of History" (*Sieger der Geschichte*), "exempted itself from all political and historical responsibility for the German past."<sup>21</sup> For East Germany, the Eichmann case thus represented an unparalleled opportunity and a very dangerous situation at the same time. It was an opportunity to condemn publicly the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) as the sole ideological and political heir of Nazi Germany, as

18 Ibid., 80.

19 John Connelly, "Why the Poles Collaborated so Little: And Why That is No Reason for Nationalist Hubris," in *Slavic Review* 64, no. 4 (2005): 772.

20 István Deák, "A Fatal Compromise? The Debate Over Collaboration and Resistance in Hungary," *East European Politics and Society* 9, no. 2 (1995): 209–33.

21 Katharina von Ankum, "Victims, Memory, History: Anti-Fascism and the Question of National Identity in East German Narratives after 1990," in *History and Memory* 7, no. 2 (1995): 42.

opposed to the GDR, “the only true anti-fascist state on German soil.”<sup>22</sup> It was a danger because of the risk that leading or well-known East German political and intellectual personalities might be implicated at any point in the criminal process against Adolf Eichmann. In early 1960, perhaps as an answer to earlier East German accusations, the FRG government issued a Bulletin about former Nazis who had pursued remarkable careers in the GDR. The list included not only scholars, artists, members of the press and diplomatic services, but also several staff executives of the Communist Party. The bulletin mentioned 56 former NSDAP (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*) members in the East German parliament that had been elected in November 1958.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, perhaps to a greater extent than countries of the bloc that had existed before 1945, the propaganda of the GDR especially favored a future-oriented approach to national identity based on the “concept of successful struggle rather than a commemoration of past sacrifices or an acknowledgement of past failures and defeats.”<sup>24</sup> The criminal procedure against Adolf Eichmann forced GDR propagandists to turn back towards the past and engage with the politics of history.

In Poland, the socialist regime prioritized a narrative of Polish victimhood at the hands of Nazi occupiers during World War II.<sup>25</sup> The Polish self-image as the “martyr of the nations” went back (at least) to the nineteenth century,<sup>26</sup> and was strengthened by the brutality of the Nazi occupation regime during World War II.<sup>27</sup> The political leadership used this historical imagery to legitimize the country’s post-war Western borders and to divert attention from the fact that the Soviet occupation of Poland during the war was also tragic. The emphasis on

22 Jan Herman Brinks, “Political Anti-Fascism in the German Democratic Republic,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 32, no. 2 (1997): 210. On attempts of the East German Stasi to stage anti-Semitic incidents in West Germany see Michael Wolffsohn, *Die Deutschland-Akte: Juden und Deutsche in Ost und West: Tatsachen und Legende* (Munich: Ferenczy bei Bruckmann, 1995).

23 Brinks, “Political Anti-Fascism,” 212–16. On the politics of the past in the DDR and Nazi war crimes see for example Henry Leide, *NS-Verbrecher und Staatssicherheit: Die geheime Vergangenheitspolitik der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006).

24 Ankum, “Victims, Memory, History,” 42.

25 Barbara Szacka, “Polish Remembrance of WWII,” *International Journal of Sociology* 36, no. 4 (2006–07): 12.

26 Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe. A Short History of Poland* (London: Clarendon Press, 1984), 202; Gerhard Wagner, “Nationalism and Cultural Memory in Poland: the European Union Turns East” in *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 17, no. 2 (2003): 205.

27 Joanna Wawrzyniak, “On the Making of Second World War Myths. War Veterans, Victims and the Communist State in Poland, 1945–1969,” in *Die Weltkriege als symbolische Bezugspunkte: Polen, die Tschechoslowakei und Deutschland nach dem Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg*, ed. Natali Stegmann (Prague: Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR, 2009), 204–05.

Eichmann's crimes against Jews was a competing narrative of what had happened in occupied Poland, and as such particularly challenging from the point of view of this Polish self-image.

Given these bloc-wide and country-specific problems of historical interpretations, the looming Eichmann trial (and the question of the propaganda that should accompany it) was dealt with in the highest echelons of the party.

### *Propaganda Goals, Hungarian Political Decisions and Bloc-Level Considerations*

Even before Eichmann was captured, there had been signals from Moscow and elsewhere in the bloc as to which issues would later become prominent during his trial. The GDR had long been campaigning against West Germany, but starting in 1956, East German propagandists unleashed a full-scale attack. They claimed that former Nazis were in positions of power in the Federal Republic. The Israeli Foreign Ministry reported a secret meeting of the leaders of Jewish communities from Poland, Romania, Hungary and East Germany in Warsaw in early February 1960. According to Israeli information, the goal of the gathering had been to prepare a joint campaign against the Bonn government.<sup>28</sup> Shortly after Eichmann's capture was announced to the world, Soviet propaganda set out to attack West Germany, arguing that the country was trying to put a stop to the trial so as to prevent the exposure of ex-Nazis active in the ranks of the West German establishment.<sup>29</sup>

The targeting of the FRG stemmed from the Cold War power-balance, East Germany's security concerns and its untenable economic and demographic situation at the time. Berlin was the only territory where the military forces of the two superpowers directly confronted each other, which caused increased tension between them. Despite the assertions of communist propaganda regarding the "crisis of capitalism," the number of East German citizens escaping to the FRG was alarming for the political leaderships in both Berlin and Moscow.<sup>30</sup> A recurrent theme of the USSR's propaganda campaign against the FRG was the supposed resurgence of revanchism and militarism, signalling to some degree

28 Letter from the Israeli Foreign Ministry to the Israeli Legations in Budapest, Warsaw and Bucharest, February 12, 1960. Papers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Israeli Missions Abroad, Folder no. 93.10/1–22, Israel State Archives.

29 Cantorovich, "Soviet Reactions to the Eichmann Trial," 111–15.

30 Between 1945 and 1961, about two and a half million people fled the German Democratic Republic for the German Federal Republic, reducing the population of the former by fifteen percent. Frederick Taylor, *The Berlin Wall. A World Divided, 1961–1989* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), XVIII.

existing Soviet anxiety of a rearmed and nuclearized West Germany. In the light of these long-term Soviet strategies, it was predictable that during the Eichmann trial, the main propaganda goal in the bloc would be to attack the FRG.

Another element that was likely to appear in official communist comments on the Eichmann court procedure was a critical stance towards Israel. After a short period of what Uri Bialer described as “knocking on any door,” Israel’s foreign policies became increasingly oriented towards the West from about the beginning of the 1950s.<sup>31</sup> During the Suez Crisis of 1956, Moscow sided with its Arab allies and after the war, Soviet-Israeli relations quickly deteriorated to an unprecedented low.<sup>32</sup> Israel became the subject of insulting attacks in the Soviet media as an aggressor, alongside France and Britain, who had also participated in the invasion of Egypt. Furthermore, the USSR government was also trying to counter Soviet Jewish aspirations for emigration with an active anti-Israel propaganda campaign.<sup>33</sup> The hostility towards the Jewish State would be sustained during the Eichmann trial.

In all probability, the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party (*MSZMP KB Küllügyi Osztály*) was well aware of these trends, and it was the first organ of Hungary’s bureaucratic apparatus to work out a plan of action to deal with the Eichmann case. Their first proposal to the Politburo on June 24, 1960 suggested that Hungary should ask for the extradition of Eichmann from Israel so that he could be tried by a Hungarian court, with the rationale that he committed a great majority of his crimes against humanity in that country.<sup>34</sup> A trial held in Hungary would have also made it possible to control the ways in which evidence was presented, in other words how Eichmann’s activities in Hungary were narrated. The draft also proposed consultations with Czechoslovakia and Poland, two other bloc countries that were major sites of Eichmann’s activities during the war.<sup>35</sup>

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31 Uri Bialer, *Between East and West: Israel’s Foreign Policy Orientation 1948–1956* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 2.

32 Benjamin Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews 1948–1967. A Documented Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 239.

33 Ibid.

34 Proposal of the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party to the Politburo in relation to the Eichmann case, by Imre Hollai and János Péter, June 24, 1960. Papers of the Department of Foreign Affairs, fond no. 288.32, document no. 1960/11, Hungarian National Archives.

35 In March 1939, Nazi Germany occupied Czechoslovakia and established a German Protectorate over Bohemia and Moravia. In the summer of the same year, Eichmann became responsible for promoting the expulsion of Czech Jews from the newly annexed Protectorate. Based on the pattern of

However, after some brief deliberations with the Foreign Ministries of these two states and the Soviet Union, the initial plan to request Eichmann's extradition was dropped because of the potential loss of prestige for the socialist states if Israel refused. Though the Czechoslovaks originally considered supporting the extradition request, Polish authorities ruled it out because the plan would not have "the slightest prospect of success, also because such a procedure would mean taking part in the conflict between Argentina and Israel,"<sup>36</sup> and because such a claim might bring about a counter claim by the Federal Republic of Germany, which is undesirable."<sup>37</sup> Instead, it was decided that any explicit recognition of the Israeli court's jurisdiction was to be avoided.<sup>38</sup> Such recognition would have run counter to the general position of socialist states, according to which Israel had no right to speak on behalf of world Jewry.

Given its strained relations with the state of Israel, the Hungarian government was unsure if it should fulfill the Israeli court's request for documentation on Eichmann's activities in the territory of Hungary during the war. Though Czechoslovakia insisted on publishing the materials first, Czechoslovakia and Hungary both provided Israel with the materials indirectly, through two semi-official organizations the names of which clearly mirror the official narratives of World War II. The National Committee of Persons Persecuted by Nazism in Hungary (*Nácizmus Magyarországi Üldözötteinek Országos Bizottsága*) and the Union

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the Viennese Central Office for Jewish Emigration (*Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung*), Eichmann created an office in Prague. Eichmann stayed in Prague until October, 1939 before being called back to Berlin. After becoming director of the RSHA section IV B 4 in March 1941, Eichmann played an important role in the deportation of over one million Jews to killing sites mostly in occupied Poland. Eichmann arrived to Budapest years later, in March 1944. By that time, Jewish emigration had been stopped and the decision about the physical extermination of Jews, the so-called "Final Solution", had long been made. By then, Eichmann had considerable experience organizing the transportation of Jews to extermination camps. Nevertheless, *Sondereinsatzkommando Eichmann's* coordination in the deportation of almost half a million Jews to Auschwitz in an extremely short time (less than two months) was unprecedented.

36 In June 1960, Argentina requested a meeting of the UN Security Council, claiming that the Israelis had violated the sovereign rights of the republic when they had abducted Eichmann in Buenos Aires. After months of negotiations and the involvement of the Security Council, Israel and Argentina eventually agreed to end their dispute with a joint statement.

37 Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Antonín Novotný, August 12, 1960. Published in Marie Chrová, "Israel in the foreign and internal politics of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in the 1960s and beyond" in *Jewish Studies at the CEU*, vol. 4, ed. András Kovács and Michael Miller (2004–2005) (Budapest: CEU, 2005), 264.

38 Though the Hungarians did acknowledge it with regards to people who had become Israeli citizens by the time of the trial.



of Anti-Fascist Fighters in Czechoslovakia<sup>39</sup> (*Sväz Protifašistických Bojovníků*) were not affiliated with the Jewish communities or any Jewish organization for that matter. In Hungary, a volume entitled *Eichmann in Hungary: Documents* by Jenő Lévai appeared in English, German and French in March, 1961, clearly targeting Western audiences.<sup>40</sup> It signalled an attempt by the Hungarian government to hold its grip over the historical memory of the war, and made clear that the Eichmann case would not be an occasion to emphasize the Jewishness of the majority of the war's Hungarian victims. The resolution of the Hungarian Politburo of June 28, 1960 clearly outlined that the propaganda concerning the Eichmann trial should not focus on the historical narrative but on contemporary political goals. According to the resolution, "in view of neo-fascist symptoms visible in the life of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Zionist nature of the Israeli government's foreign and domestic policy, [the case] must be used to strengthen the antifascist front against fascist efforts."<sup>41</sup>

István Szirmai, the substitute member of the Politburo responsible for culture and ideology, suggested a way to connect Israel's "Zionist policies" with the history of the war. His interest in the topic is unsurprising. Szirmai was born into a Jewish family in 1906 in the small town of Zilah (Zaláu) in Transylvania. Although he started his political career in the Socialist-Zionist *Hashomer Hatzair* movement before the war, he later joined the Romanian Communist Party. The early 1940s found him in Budapest, living illegally as the liaison between Transylvanian communists and the Hungarian Communist Party. After spending the second half of the war in prison, Szirmai transferred to the Hungarian communists and acted as the party's functionary unofficially responsible for "Zionist affairs" during the Rákosi period. His position toward Zionism was not in the least bit friendly at that time. He proposed to ban all Zionist organizations on the grounds that they were "spreading bourgeois nationalism, adding to the emigration craze through their organizations, smuggling hard currency, 'rescuing property,' and damaging the forint."<sup>42</sup> In the course of a private meeting with

39 Chrová, "Israel in the foreign and internal politics," 263.

40 Jenő Lévai, ed., *Eichmann in Hungary: Documents* (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1961); idem, ed., *Eichmann en Hongrie: Documents* (Budapest: Kossuth, 1961); idem, ed., *Eichmann in Ungarn: Dokumente* (Budapest: Univ. druck, 1961). These books were printed in Budapest but were not officially published by any publishing house in Hungary. Therefore, it is highly probable that they were not available domestically.

41 "Decision of the Politburo, 28 June 1960," in *Jewish Studies*, ed. Kovács and Miller, 221.

42 András Kovács, "Hungarian Jewish Politics from the End of the Second World War until the Collapse of Communism," in *Jews and the State: Dangerous Alliances and the Perils of Privilege*, ed. Ezra Mendelsohn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 133.

two ultra-left Zionist emissaries from Palestine in the late 1940s, Szirmai also opined that Zionism was “a dangerous ideology based on disregard for realities.” He prophesized that in a couple of years’ time, “nobody would consider himself Jewish in Hungary.”<sup>43</sup> Ironically, Szirmai was imprisoned for his “Zionist activities” by Mátyás Rákosi at the beginning of 1953, when Rákosi was planning a Hungarian Zionist show trial similar to the Doctors’ Plot in the USSR and the Slánský trial in Czechoslovakia. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that during the Politburo meeting in 1960, Szirmai highlighted that

there are certain matters which severely compromise the Israeli government and the Zionist movement. Eichmann knows about these things, and the Israelis don’t want them to come to light. Such factors also exist. There was that Kaszner [sic] affair, whom the Israeli government had shot in order to shut him up.<sup>44</sup>

Rezső (Rudolf) Kasztner was a Jewish journalist from Transylvania who was a member of the Hungarian Zionist movement. At an early age, he joined the youth group *Barisia*, the members of which were preparing to become citizens of the envisioned future state of Israel. During the war, Kasztner moved to Budapest, where, as a member of the Jewish Rescue and Aid Committee, he tried to help Jewish refugees obtain exit visas to go to Palestine. In 1944, he successfully negotiated with Eichmann the transport of one train with 1,658 Jews on it to neutral Switzerland.<sup>45</sup>

Szirmai was suggesting at the Politburo session that Kasztner was assassinated because, as a supporter of the Zionist movement during the war, he had cooperated with the Nazis to save wealthy Jews from extermination. He implied that the Israeli government had arranged Kasztner’s death to prevent him from revealing this connection between Zionism and Nazism. Contrary to Szirmai’s claims, Rezső Kasztner was shot in Tel Aviv by a young supporter of the extreme right wing, Zeev Eckstein, and not on the orders of the Israeli government, of which Kasztner was a member as a spokesman for the Ministry

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43 George Garai’s interview with A. Yaari, Jewish Agency emissary to the Hashomer Hatzair in Hungary between 1946–1948. Quoted in George Garai, *The Policy towards the Jews, Zionism, and Israel of the Hungarian Communist Party, 1945–1953* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, London School of Economics, 1979), 128.

44 “Minutes of the Politburo of the Hungarian Socialist Worker’s Party 28 June 1960,” in vol. 4 of *Jewish Studies at the CEU*, ed. András Kovács and Michael Miller (Budapest: CEU, 2005), 217–18.

45 Anna Porter, *Kasztner’s Train* (Vancouver–Toronto: Douglas McIntyre, 2007), esp. 9–50.



of Transportation. Szirmai's version of the story is therefore rather absurd, but nevertheless highlights a possible avenue through which the unfriendliness of communist leaderships towards the state of Israel in the 1960s could influence their official narratives about World War II.

At the same Politburo meeting, General Secretary of the party János Kádár also touched upon the question of historical interpretations of the Hungarian Holocaust that should be brought forward in official propaganda. He emphasized that

[i]t's not a good idea to turn these awful fascist affairs into an exclusively Jewish question. If we do act in this affair, the decisive thing should be that Eichmann murdered hundreds of thousands of Hungarian citizens... Eichmann did not only murder Jews, there were others there, too. This is not a Jewish question; this is the question of fascism and anti-fascism.<sup>46</sup>

By emphasizing the fascist/anti-fascist struggle, Kádár indicated that he intended to strictly follow the official communist interpretation.

Although it is true that more than half a million Jewish victims of the Holocaust were Hungarians, one problematic part of Kádár's statement was his assertion that they had been *citizens*. The majority of Hungary's Holocaust victims were killed because they were considered Jewish, and not because of their Hungarian nationality (or citizenship), as Kádár's remark implies. The General Secretary also overlooked the fact that by 1944, the elected governments of the Hungarian state had deprived Jews of most of the rights citizens would usually enjoy, restricting their access to employment, education and property, and curbing their right to free movement and marriage.<sup>47</sup>

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46 "Minutes of the Politburo" in *Jewish Studies*, ed. Kovács and Miller, 218.

47 The first Anti-Jewish Law of 1938 ruled that Jews could occupy only up to twenty percent of positions in the free intellectual professions. The second Anti-Jewish Law, which was enacted a year later, capped Jewish presence in intellectual occupations at six percent and forbade their employment in legal and public administrative apparatuses and in secondary school education. Jews could not be employed by theatres or in the press in positions where it was feared they might influence the organs' intellectual focus. The law limited the number of Jews employed at companies and reinstated the Numerus Clausus in education. Jews were completely excluded from trades that were subject to state authorization. The acquisition of agricultural property by Jews was made significantly more difficult. The third Anti-Jewish Law of 1941, which appropriated the racial definition of Jews used by the Nazi Nuremberg Laws, forbade mixed marriages between Jews and non-Jews and also criminalized sexual relationships between them. Other anti-Jewish Laws enacted in the following years discriminated against the Jewish religious community,

This illustrates an especially problematic part of the Hungarian communist state's attitudes toward the war. Kádár's regime condemned the Horthy establishment as fascist, but it placed the blame for the alliance with Nazi Germany on "the ruling classes" and their oppression and manipulation of the proletariat and the peasantry. At the same time, it negated official governmental attempts in the course of the war to achieve an armistice<sup>48</sup> and overlooked the general public's acceptance and, in many cases, endorsement of anti-Semitic policies. Kádár's presentation thus deliberately ignored the domestic political roots of and popular support for Hungary's alliance with Nazi Germany, which offered territorial revisions for Hungary's benefit, because these details of history did not fit into the communist narrative of the war and would have undermined the Communist Party's claim for legitimacy in Hungary, built on the myth of widespread anti-fascist resistance.

### *Successful Attainment of Propaganda Goals: the Implication of the Federal Republic of Germany*

Though it has been argued in academic literature that propaganda always reflected the policy goals of the communist leadership,<sup>49</sup> in the post-Stalinist context, the two certainly should not be equated. The following pages present the Hungarian media coverage of the Eichmann trial's court proceedings in four dailies (*Népszabadság*, *Népszava*, *Magyar Nemzet* and *Esti Hírlap*), on the national *Radio Kossuth*, and in the official journal of the Jewish community: *Új*

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completely forbade the acquisition of agricultural property by Jews, forced Jewish men into labor service and restricted Jewish rights to free movement.

48 There were a few semi-official attempts by the Kállay government to contact the British and the Americans as early as 1942, but as of the spring of 1943 (largely triggered by the catastrophic defeat of the Second Hungarian Army in the Voronezh area in January of that year), more serious efforts were made to contact the Allies to arrange an armistice. With regards to the Kádár regime's attitude to the Kállay government, it must be pointed out that this position was later revised by the Department of Contemporary History (MTA Történettudományi Intézet Legújabbkori Osztály) under the auspices of the Academy of Sciences. Under the leadership of György Ránki, the department reevaluated the policies of the Kállay government (in office between March, 1942 and March, 1944), with special emphasis on attempts to abandon the war and break the alliance with Nazi Germany. Ránki, together with other historians such as Iván T. Berend and later Miklós Szabó, attempted to rehabilitate Kállay's policies and show that the attempts to get out of the war were genuine. For more details see: See: Miklós Szabó, "A Ludovikától a Magvetőig," *Beszélő* 3, no. 10 (1998). Accessed October 8, 2015, <http://beszelo.c3.hu/98/10/13szab.htm>.

49 Baruch Hazan, *Soviet Impregnational Propaganda* (Michigan: Ardis, 1982), 11–12. François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 180–81.

*Élet*.<sup>50</sup> *Népszabadság* was the national paper of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, while *Esti Hírlap* unofficially belonged to the Party's Budapest unit and the municipal leadership of the capital (*Fővárosi Tanács*) and was more like a tabloid. *Népszava* was the official daily of the trade unions and, thus, its target audience was the workers. *Magyar Nemzet* was the newspaper of the Patriotic Peoples' Front (*Hazafias Népfront*) and essentially addressed the intelligentsia. As mentioned above, *Új Élet* was the official paper of the Jewish religious community, though it operated under strict political supervision. Hungarian media covered the trial very thoroughly, with about seventy articles in the aforementioned papers appearing during the trial and one hundred and thirty-seven articles altogether in the period beginning with the capture of Eichmann and ending with his execution (see Table 1).

Three journalists were allowed by the government to be present at the court in Jerusalem: Tibor Pethő of *Magyar Nemzet*, László Koncsek of the Hungarian Radio and Sándor Barcs from the Hungarian News Agency (*Magyar Távirati Iroda*). Tibor Pethő was the son of Sándor Pethő, the founder of *Magyar Nemzet*, and had worked for the paper as the editor of foreign news reports between 1952 and 1957. He was among those who supported Imre Nagy during the revolutionary events of 1956 and was even a member of the National Alliance of Hungarian Journalists (*Magyar Újságírók Országos Szövetsége*) that negotiated with the Kádár government in 1957, trying to convince them to allow certain banned newspapers to be published again. The negotiations bore no fruit and Pethő was then employed by *Hétféli Hírek*, a newspaper of little significance. He was reinstated to *Magyar Nemzet* in 1960 and thus the coverage of the Eichmann trial was his first major assignment. The politicians responsible for Hungarian cultural policies probably speculated that Pethő would follow the principles set by the regime in his reports on the Eichmann trial. Sándor Barcs, who had been a fellow traveller of the Smallholder's Party before the communist takeover in 1948, was the head of the Hungarian News Agency (*Magyar Távirati Iroda*), as well as a representative in Parliament and, as of 1959, a member of the Presidential Committee (*Elnöki Tanács*). Thus, he was a safe choice to toe the line defined by the Politburo when covering the proceedings of the trial. László Koncsek was an editor of the Hungarian radio and a specialist on the Middle East, though he mostly wrote travel diaries.

50 Based on the Radio Free Europe Press Survey collections available at the Open Society Archives, Records of Radio Free Europe, Hungarian Unit, fond no. 300-40-1, box no. 1606.

However, many others also wrote about the trial: more than twenty other journalists and historians produced articles or reports. Among them were Ilona Benoschofsky, head of the Hungarian Jewish Museum, who wrote five articles for *Új Élet*, and Jenő Lévai, who was considered an authority on the history of Fascism and World War II in Hungary and the author of the aforementioned collection of Hungarian archival documents on the Holocaust published in 1961.<sup>51</sup>

...the trial	Népszava	Nép- szabadság	Magyar Nemzet	Új Élet	Esti Hírlap	Other	Total
Before	17	8	12	10	3	8	58
During	5	14	20	10	4	16	69
After	1	3	1	3	2	0	10
Total	23	25	33	23	9	24	137

Table 1: Coverage of the Eichmann trial in the Hungarian media (no. of articles)

An analysis of the articles that appeared on some aspect or aspects of the Eichmann trial reveals the extent to which the party line described above was followed and the degree to which the Kádár regime successfully controlled the narrative of World War II and the Holocaust.

Hungarian media put great emphasis on the critique of West Germany. That former Nazis were still occupying high positions in West Germany was the most common topic in the Hungarian coverage of the proceedings, appearing in almost half of the articles on the Eichmann case (see Table 2). *Új Élet* noted, for instance, “with regards to Eichmann’s case, attention must be drawn to the situation in West Germany and the unchanged activities of the rest of the Nazi criminals.”<sup>52</sup> The press also targeted specific individuals in the West German political establishment. It claimed that out of 17 West-German Ministers and Secretaries of State, “12 belonged to the leadership of the Nazi Party” and that “among the admirals and generals of the *Bundeswehr*, 40 had served in Hitler’s *Wehrmacht*.”<sup>53</sup> The politicians in question were frequently mentioned by name,

51 On Jenő Lévai’s role and activities during the Eichmann trial see János Dési, “Lévai Jenő Jeruzsálemben,” *Múlt és Jövő* 24, no. 1 (2015): 76–86. I would like to thank Ferenc Laczó for providing me with the manuscript before its publication.

52 “Az Eichmann per ítéletének nemcsak Eichmannt kell sújtania, hanem bele kell világítania a náci barbarizmus mechanizmusába is,” *Új Élet*, August 15, 1960.

53 István Merly, “Eichmann volt cinkosai a nyugatnémet államapparátusban,” *Esti Hírlap*, April 11, 1961.

among them Hans Globke, one of the closest aides to Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and a man who played an important role in drafting anti-Semitic laws at the Ministry of the Interior during the Nazi period, and Gerhard Schröder, Minister of the Interior. Accusations against Schröder were not new, as his Nazi past had been aired years before, even in the West.<sup>54</sup>

...the trial	Before	% <sup>1</sup>	During	%	After	%	Total
Reporting on the trial itself	14	24.1	35	50.7	6	40.0	55
Eichmann's earlier life and career, Eichmann's activities in Hungary, Holocaust	37	63.8	6	8.7	0	0.0	43
Alliance between wealthy Jews and Nazis during World War II	8	13.8	1	1.5	0	0.0	9
Critique of West Germany	25	43.1	33	47.8	6	40.0	64
Critique of other Western countries and organizations (Austria, USA, NATO)	0	0	3	4.35	1	6.7	4
Critique of Israel (alliance with West Germany)	4	6.89	16	23.2	2	13.3	22
Critique of Zionism	0	0	1	1.5	0	0	1

1 Of all the articles that appeared during the period under investigation (i.e. before, during or after the trial), what percentage of the total number of articles dealt with the given issue. The total number of articles is in Table 1.

Table 2: Coverage of the Eichmann trial in the Hungarian media (issues)

The focus on the critique of West Germany was perfectly in line with the interpretation by Soviet media, which held that during the Eichmann trial, “attempts were made to not reveal former Nazis”<sup>55</sup> and that Chancellor Adenauer permitted “yesterday’s assistants of Hitler, Himmler and Kaltenbrunner to occupy leading posts”<sup>56</sup> in the Federal Republic. According to the contemporary press analysis of *B’nai B’rith*,

54 For example, *Time Magazine* mentioned it in an editorial entitled “The Case of Otto John” as early as August 23, 1954. Accessed October 8, 2015, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,823490,00.html>.

55 Govrin, *Israeli–Soviet Relations*, 77.

56 William Korey, “In history’s ‘memory hole’: the Soviet treatment of the Holocaust” in *Contemporary Views of the Holocaust*, ed. Randolph L. Braham (Boston–The Hague–Dordrecht–Lancaster: Kluwer Nijhoff Publishing, 1983), 152.

the press treatment of the Eichmann case in the Soviet Union prior to the opening of the trial on April 11 was marked by 1) relative paucity; 2) an emphasis upon an alleged relationship between Eichmann's crimes and present-day rulers of West-Germany; and 3) a general minimization of Eichmann's crimes against Jews compared with his crimes against people generally. These features continued after the trial began.<sup>57</sup>

Likewise, in the German Democratic Republic, the trial in Jerusalem served as a pretext to attack the political elite of the Federal Republic: a Jewish-German lawyer, Friedrich Karl Kaul was sent to Jerusalem to present compromising documents on Hans Globke,<sup>58</sup> and many brochures on the issue were published at home.<sup>59</sup> For instance, right after Eichmann's capture, East Berlin propagandists quickly produced two pamphlets entitled "Globke and the Extermination of the Jews" [*Globke und die Ausrottung der Juden*] and "New Proof of Globke's Crimes against the Jews" [*Neue Beweise für Globkes Verbrechen gegen die Juden*]. The Israeli prosecution was approached by the East Germans to allow Kaul to join the team as an adviser, but Attorney General Gideon Hausner rejected the request on the grounds that there were no diplomatic relations between Israel and East Germany.<sup>60</sup>

The Czechoslovak news agency *Ceteka* emphasized on the occasion of Eichmann's execution in 1962 that the trial had not been carried out "to the full" despite the death sentence. According to *Ceteka*, "fascist groups" in the FRG and some other Western countries not only offered financial support to Eichmann's counsel, Dr. Servatius, but also "moral support" in the Western press.<sup>61</sup>

It is thus clear that the denunciation of West Germany was a priority in communist states. The press and the propaganda machinery reacted in unison with well-known accusations that did not present anything new in addition to

57 "B'nai B'rith Report on Media Coverage of the Eichmann Case in Communist Countries, June 1961," in *Jewish Studies*, ed. Kovács and Miller, 242–43.

58 Moshe Hess, Deputy to the Official in Charge of the Information Section, Israel Mission in Cologne to Leo Savir, Deputy Head of the Mission, 20 February, 1960. Paper of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Israeli Missions Abroad, document no. RG 93.43/MFA/584/5, Israel State Archives.

59 Angelika Timm, "Ideology and Realpolitik: East German Attitudes towards Zionism and Israel," *Journal of Israeli History* 25, no. 1 (2006): 206.

60 RFE Special Report, Tel Aviv, March 29, 1961. Fond 300-40-1, box. 1606, Open Society Archives. Also: John P. Teschke, *Hitler's Legacy. West Germany Confronts the Aftermath of the Third Reich* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 197.

61 "Eichmann – Communist reporting on execution." Records of Radio Free Europe, Czechoslovak Unit: Fond 300-30-3, microfilm no. 63, Open Society Archives.

the countries' previous positions towards the FRG. Most of the accusations were not only old, but had already been published in the West as well.

Closely connected to accusations against the Adenauer government for having forgiven and even having been supportive of former Nazis was the presentation of Israel as a collaborator with West Germany. This was a much more complicated issue, as the task of communist propaganda here was to criticize Israel without appearing anti-Semitic. Journalist Tibor Pethő remembered that before they were sent off to Jerusalem to report on the trial, István Szirmai had instructed them to be careful not to incite anti-Semitic feelings among the Hungarian population.<sup>62</sup>

The issue of Israeli–West German collaboration appeared twenty-two times in Hungarian newspapers and radio programs during the period under investigation, making it the fourth most salient issue. The articles claimed that, in order to preserve good relations between Israel and West Germany, Israeli authorities made sure that Eichmann's confessions would not affect certain high-ranking German politicians negatively.<sup>63</sup> According to one article, Ben Gurion “met Adenauer with a secretive smile on his face and he contentedly patted the side pocket of his jacket as he left. If one had looked into it (the pocket), one would have found a check for about 500 million [Deutsche] Marks.”<sup>64</sup> According to another report, “[t]he Eichmann-trial, instead of becoming the trial of the general condemnation of Fascism, turned into a West German–Israeli affair. Behind the trial, there are shady economic and political interests that are seldom revealed.”<sup>65</sup> Not only did the Hungarian press criticize the Israeli leadership for “collaboration” with West Germany, certain articles also implied that the elites of Hungary's Jewish population had collaborated with the Nazis during World War II. *Magyar Nemzet* elaborated on this issue as follows:

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62 Adrienne Molnár, ed., *A “batvanas évek” emlékezője* (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2004), 147.

63 It must be noted that Deborah E. Lipstadt claims that Ben-Gurion asked the prosecutor during the Eichmann trial not to use the word “Germany” but only “Nazi Germany” when referring to the country during World War II to emphasize the discontinuity between the Third Reich and the FRG. See: Deborah E. Lipstadt, *The Eichmann Trial* (New York: Schocken, 2011), 25–26. It must be at least considered plausible that in view of Ben-Gurion's support for the “new Germany” and the reparations paid by the FRG to the Jewish State for material damages during the Holocaust at that time, Israel did not want to jeopardize its good relations with West Germany by highlighting certain sensitive continuities. Therefore, though exaggerated, communist propaganda claims were not completely unfounded regarding this issue.

64 “Az Eichmann-ügy a leláncolt kacsa görbe tükrében,” *Magyar Nemzet*, April 15, 1961.

65 Tibor Pethő, “Ami a jeruzsálemi perből kimaradt,” in *Magyar Nemzet*, 23 July, 1961.



Ferenc Chorin,<sup>66</sup> who had been arrested by the *Gestapo*, and his “interrogator” Kurt Becher, SS-lieutenant-colonel, negotiated for weeks. Several arrested members of the Hungarian plutocracy joined the meetings. Rich capitalists who were still free also took part in the negotiations in the prison... The group of rich capitalists arrived in Lisbon on June 25 [1944] on a German private plane. A day before, the removal of everyday Jewish people had been completed in Budapest, and two days later, the first phase of the Eichmann mission ended with the deportation of 420 thousand people to Auschwitz. Hitlerite Fascism, while loudly condemning “plutocratic” capitalists, killed the workers with one hand and saved the capitalists with the other, proving its real class character.<sup>67</sup>

Taken together with depictions of “shady economic and political interests” behind the trial, the Hungarian press coverage not only asserted continuity between Nazi Germany and the FRG, but also implied a similar continuity between the behavior of Jewish leadership in East-Central Europe during World War II and that of the leading Israeli politicians in the 1960s. The relations between Israel and West Germany, as well as a few selected members of the Hungarian Jewish community and Nazi officers during World War II, expressed in such images are reminiscent of older anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jews as worldly, greedy and involved in questionable business transactions “behind the scenes.” The victims appear first and foremost as members of the working class, and the fact that they were deported on the basis of race is underplayed. At the same time, one gets the impression that all Jewish members of the capitalist higher elites were exempted from persecution as a result of secret negotiations. Even if we accept that the Hungarian Politburo indeed did not want to incite anti-Semitic feelings, such reports, which featured quite prominently among those before the trial (see Table 2), clearly made use of anti-Semitic imagery. In that sense, the bloc-wide use of propaganda to draw links between Nazi Germany, the FRG and Israel (and the determination to frame wartime deaths in

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66 Ferenc Chorin was a wealthy Jewish businessman of the Horthy period, the director of Salgótarjáni Kőszénbánya Rt., a coal mine and its adjoining factory. Through his various posts in professional and political organizations, he also belonged to the closest political circles of Regent Miklós Horthy. Chorin was forced to resign from many of his various posts as a result of the anti-Jewish legislation in 1941. After Hungary's occupation, he was among the first to be arrested by the SS. Nevertheless, he managed to negotiate a deal which resulted in the SS taking ownership (officially for 25 years) of the largest industrial empire in Hungary in exchange for the Chorin family's departure to Portugal and Switzerland.

67 János Komlós, “Ami az Eichmann-ügy mögött van,” *Magyar Nemzet*, April 6, 1961.



the context of class) had the potential to override the Hungarian state's intention to separate criticisms of Israel from anti-Semitism.

### *A Less Successful Implementation of Propaganda: Public Memory and the Holocaust Narrative*

As Table 2 reveals, before the trial took place, the historical narrative of Eichmann's activities in Hungary and, closely related to that, the ghettoization and deportation of Jews to Auschwitz dominated the discourse in the Hungarian press. More than sixty percent of the articles addressed these issues, making the history of the Holocaust in Hungary the most prominent theme. The articles revealed a lot of information on Eichmann's activities before and during his Hungarian mission, as well as particulars about his relations with the leadership of the Hungarian state administration and the Budapest Jewish Council. Information about these details was available to the journalists due to a remarkable amount of publications that had been produced in the immediate postwar years,<sup>68</sup> material to which some of the press articles explicitly referred.<sup>69</sup>

A dominant narrative in these pre-trial historical accounts in the Hungarian press portrays the behavior of the Hungarian state administration. "At the beginning of April 1944, in a meeting room of the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior," reported *Esti Hírlap*, State Secretaries "László Endre, László Baky, the leaders of the gendarmerie and the German specialists gathered for a meeting to decide about deportations and discuss the details."<sup>70</sup> At that same meeting, an agitated Regent Horthy is quoted in *Népszava* as having said, in reference to the Jews of Hungary, "[o]ut with them from the country!"<sup>71</sup> *Népszabadság* claimed that Eichmann's special commando "counted on the help of the Sztójay

68 See Ferenc Laczó's "From 'European Fascism' to 'the Fate of the Jews.' Early Hungarian Jewish Monographs on the Holocaust" and also his "The Foundational Dilemmas of Jenő Lévai. On the Birth of Hungarian Holocaust Historiography in the 1940s," *Holocaust Studies* 21, no. 1 (2015). I would like to thank Ferenc Laczó for providing me with his manuscripts. Péter Dávidházi and Tamás Kisantal explored similar topics, analyzing Hungarian literary texts about the Holocaust from the early postwar years in their presentations during the conference "Trauma-Holocaust-Literature" (Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, Budapest, November 2014).

69 "A budapesti kollégák," *Népszava*, June 4, 1960 refers Jenő Lévai's *Fekete könyv a magyar zsidóság szenvedéséről* (Budapest: Officina, 1946) and his *Szürke könyv a magyar zsidók megmentéséről* (Budapest: Officina, 1946). "Dokumentumok Eichmann magyarországi rémtetteiről," *Magyar Nemzet*, June 5, 1960 references Ernő Munkácsi, though without providing further details.

70 "A halál minisztere. Tömegirtás és üzlet," *Esti Hírlap*, December 6, 1960.

71 "Horthy és Eichmann," *Népszava*, June 5, 1960.

government [for ghettoization], but it was a welcome surprise for them that the Hungarian government voluntarily provided the services of 20,000 gendarmes.”<sup>72</sup> Not only was the Hungarian state administration presented as a willing partner of Eichmann, but on several occasions, as initiator of the deportations of the country’s Jews. For example, Eichmann was quoted as having claimed that “he had promised László Endre that not a single Jew would remain alive,”<sup>73</sup> implying that the issue was more important to the Hungarian State Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior than to the *Obersturmbannführer*. As for the period following the takeover of power by the Arrow Cross movement, *Esti Hírlap* reported that Eichmann and his men “found in Szálasi and his men like-minded souls.”<sup>74</sup>

The leadership of the Hungarian state administration, members of the national socialist Arrow Cross (*nyilaskeresztes*) movement, and Regent Horthy himself were all referred to as fascists. There appeared to be no distinction between the ideas represented by the Regent, who was still in power when the deportations began (and whose political stance was based on a conservative-Christian set of values that fed on the traditions of the Hungarian nobility), the Sztójay government (which collaborated with the Germans in the implementation of the Holocaust) and Arrow Cross leader Ferenc Szálasi’s premiership (which instituted large-scale violence against Jews).

The terminology dated back to the People’s Courts (*népbíróság*) of the early postwar years, which were established to prosecute war criminals, but came under strong communist influence.<sup>75</sup> In addition to convicting war criminals, they also aimed to discredit the entire Horthy period, and with that, the political adversaries of the communists, while not addressing the problem that broad segments of the Hungarian population had supported many of the ideas and policies of the Horthy regime.<sup>76</sup> The transformation of the Horthy era into a

72 “Adolf Eichmann elemében,” *Népszabadság*, June 3, 1960.

73 “Nyugat-Németországban letartóztatták Hauptsturmführer [sic] Hunsche-t, Eichmann magyarországi helyettesét,” *Új Élet*, December 1, 1960.

74 “A halál minisztere.”

75 László Karsai, “The People’s Courts and Revolutionary Justice in Hungary, 1945–1946,” in *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and its Aftermath*, ed. István Deák, Jan T. Gross, and Tony Judt (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 233–51. Viktor Karády, *Túlélők és újrakezdők* (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő, 2002), 15; Petru Weber, “A háborús bűnök megtorlása a második világháború utáni Romániában és Magyarországon,” *Korall* 8, no. 28–29 (2007): 134–45, esp. 141.

76 As early as 1948, eminent Hungarian political thinker István Bibó warned in an essay about the problems concerning the way in which the persecution of Jews in Hungary was addressed during the court procedures. According to Bibó, the conviction of criminals masked the fact that during World War II

“fascist dictatorship” tantamount to that of Hitler and Mussolini continued in Hungarian historiography during the Rákosi period.<sup>77</sup>

During its early years, the Kádár regime maintained this narrative, and its first interpretations of the 1956 “counter-revolution” established continuity between the White Terror that followed the fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919, the “fascist” Horthy regime and the events of October 1956. According to official publications that appeared in Hungary between 1957 and 1959, the outbreak of the “counter-revolution” was linked to the infiltration of Hungary by fascist elements from the West and the re-emergence of domestic Hungarian fascists from the Horthy era and the Arrow Cross movement.<sup>78</sup> The masses were tricked by the “nationalist, chauvinist, and anti-Soviet” catchwords used by the clandestine fascists in order to gain support. The February 1957 “Resolution of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party with regards to Current Questions and Tasks” referred to the October events as a “counter-revolution” but attributed the actions of the population to a smaller group of provocateurs.<sup>79</sup> This minority of inimical elements, the party narrative maintained, “using the dissatisfaction of the masses caused by the previous party leadership’s mistakes, aimed to confuse the working masses’ class consciousness with chauvinist, nationalist, revisionist, anti-Semitic and other bourgeois counterrevolutionary ideas.”<sup>80</sup> In order to substantiate the interpretation of the 1956 revolution as having been instigated by (domestic and returning foreign) fascists, Kádár’s propaganda exaggerated their presence and influence during the Horthy era. Therefore, even though the Kádár regime did not prioritize the narration of the Hungarian Holocaust in relation to the Eichmann trial, the reiteration of earlier claims about the strong alliance between Horthy’s establishment and Nazi Germany, as well as the “fascism” of the former did correspond to other propaganda goals of the time related to the 1956 revolution.

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Hungarian society as a whole had abandoned the Jews before it had itself become the victim of Fascism. This, according to Bibó, was nevertheless never addressed and the victimhood of Jews was incorporated into the general group of the victims of Fascism. See: István Bibó, *Zsidókérdés Magyarországon 1944 után* (Budapest: Neuwald, 1948).

77 See for example: Gusztáv Heckenast et al., *A magyar nép története: rövid áttekintés* (Budapest: Művelt Nép, 1951).

78 Heino Nyyssönen, *The Presence of the Past in Politics. ‘1956’ after 1956 in Hungary* (Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä Printing House, 1999), 92–95.

79 Kalmár Melinda, *Ennivaló és hozomány. A kora kádárizmus ideológiája* (Budapest: Magvető, 1998), 29.

80 Minutes of the meeting of the Temporary Executive Committee, November 23, 1956. Minutes of the Meetings of the Politburo of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party, M-KS 288.5/4, Hungarian National Archives.

After the Eichmann trial began in April 1961, however, the historical narrative spectacularly lost its prominence in the Hungarian press. Close to ninety percent of all the articles that presented the historical narrative appeared before the trial. At the same time, Hungarian propaganda was especially unsuccessful at having the Eichmann trial presented not as “a deportation story but an attack on the reviving West-German imperialism and its Nazi cadres,”<sup>81</sup> and the trial’s certain details as a series of events that happened to “Hungarian citizens.” Such a goal would have been hard to achieve because, during the course of the trial in Jerusalem, the fact that the great majority of the Eichmann’s victims were Jews came to the fore.

The proceedings, witnesses and supporting documents of the trial became predominantly focused on the persecution of Jews during World War II. For instance, the trial highlighted the fact that Hungarian authorities had discriminated specifically against Jews with numerous anti-Semitic measures. During one session, a document presented to the Presiding Judge described a debate in the Hungarian Parliament from December 1942 on the question of labor camps for Jews and the ban on Christian women from work in Jewish homes. During the same session, another document revealed that Jewish intellectuals had been made to perform forced labor in Hungary in 1943.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, some eyewitness accounts mentioned the economic interests of some of the Hungarian population in acquiring Jewish property as a result of deportations. Hansi Brand remembered one of the marches on foot when thousands of Jews had been driven through the streets by the SS.<sup>83</sup> When asked about how the Hungarian public had reacted to the scene, Brand answered that “[s]ome just stared at them dully—they were the better ones; the others were pleased that those who had been bombed out were going to have nice Jewish flats.”<sup>84</sup> This kind of narrative ran counter to Kádár’s grouping of all victims under the undifferentiated category of “Hungarian citizens.” On the contrary, it revealed that Jews were explicit targets of legal discrimination, that different

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81 Letter from Ferenc Esztergályos (Deputy Department Head, 2<sup>nd</sup> Regional Department of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs) to János Péter with regards to the Eichmann trial, February 9, 1961. Papers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Secret Documents, XIX-J-1-j (Israel), box no. 13, 30/c, document no. 0081/4/1961, Hungarian National Archives.

82 Session 51, documents 972 and 1341 respectively, in *The Trial of Adolf Eichmann. Record of Proceedings in the District Court of Jerusalem*, vol. 3 (Jerusalem: State of Israel Ministry of Justice, 1993), 929.

83 On Hansi Brandt, see footnote 5 above.

84 Ibid., 1054.

groups within Hungarian society had different interests, and that the persecution of one group could mean potential economic gain for another.

As a result of the thematic focus of the trial in Jerusalem, very few articles *during* the Eichmann trial in the Hungarian press dealt with non-Jewish (or non-specified, general) suffering only. Even if one part of a certain article only mentioned the victimization of citizens in general, some other part of the piece usually revealed that they were indeed Jews. *Népszabadság* reported first on Hungarian issues that were discussed during the trial. One article provides a fine example of how the Party line and the story of the Jewish Holocaust both appeared within one text. When introducing the Hungarian period of Eichmann's activities, the newspaper claimed that the documents of the prosecution had revealed "the bloody and dirty details of Eichmann's reign of terror in Hungary..." including "the tragic history of four hundred thousand Hungarians who were killed in gas chambers and during death marches."<sup>85</sup> This kind of phrasing followed the party line introduced by Kádár. Yet the same report later described negotiations with the leaders of the Jewish religious community in March 1944, just days after the German invasion. The article presented how Eichmann's subordinates had claimed that "[n]othing will happen to the Jews,' they said, 'with the exception of a few restrictive measures. Please calm the Jews down.' At the end of May... deportations began."<sup>86</sup> Despite the vagueness in the introduction, the most common feature of the Hungarians killed in gas chambers—their Jewishness—was eventually made quite clear.

To determine the level of relativization of Jewish victimhood during the war, I examine newspaper reports that discuss both Jewish and unspecified or general victimhood in the same article. Before the trial, 36 articles dealt with victimhood during the war, out of which 55.6 percent (20) dealt *only* with Jewish victimhood, 13.9 percent (5) dealt *only* with unspecified victimhood and 30.5 percent (11) dealt with *both* issues. During the trial, 33 articles dealt with victimhood during the war, out of which 72.7 percent (24) dealt *only* with Jewish victimhood, 21.2 percent (7) dealt *only* with unspecified victimhood and only 6.1 percent (2) dealt with *both* issues (See Table 3). It is clear that articles and programs that dealt exclusively with Jewish victimhood were much more pronounced *during* the trial than before it. The first reports about the trial's presentation of Eichmann's activities in Hungary during World War II claimed that "Eichmann was the

85 "Jegyzetek a jeruzsálemi tárgyalásról," *Népszabadság*, May 28, 1961.

86 Ibid.

lord of life and death in Budapest and the despot of Hungarian Jews,”<sup>87</sup> and, more specifically, that “Eichmann traveled to Budapest in 1944 personally to supervise the deportation of Jews.”<sup>88</sup> Eyewitness accounts were quoted that also concentrated on Jewish persecution. According to an article in *Magyar Nemzet*, “Eyewitness accounts presented last Friday at the Nazi mass murderer’s trial revealed that Eichmann beat to death a Jewish boy who stole cherries from his garden in the shed of his Budapest villa in 1944.”<sup>89</sup>

Coverage of non-Jewish suffering and combined coverage (i.e. Jewish and non-Jewish suffering in one article or radio program) were much more frequent before the trial. This suggests that, because the information and conclusions resulting from the trial were determined by the Israeli attorneys, the Hungarian regime lost control over the terms of reference, and this in turn led to an increase in the number of reports and stories dealing with Jewish victimhood in the Hungarian press. The trial simply did not provide Hungarian journalists with sufficient material to allow them to focus on general/unspecified victimhood.

...the trial	Before	During	After
Mentions Jewish victimhood during the war	31	26	2
Mentions <i>only</i> Jewish victimhood during the war	20	24	2
Mentions unspecified/general victimhood during the war	16	9	2
Mentions <i>only</i> unspecified/general victimhood during the war	5	7	2
Mentions Jewish <i>and</i> general victimhood during the war	11	2	0

Table 3: Coverage of the Eichmann trial in the Hungarian media (Holocaust)

Using the Kasztner case to imply close links between Zionists and Nazi officers in Hungary was another part of the propaganda strategy that failed. The Israeli court was very cautious not to involve Kasztner’s case in the proceedings. The whole Kasztner problem signified a deep ideological split in Israeli society and politics between the nationalist right wing and socialist-Zionist left wing. At any rate, the court was not likely to be particularly sympathetic to Kasztner; Judge Benjamin Halevi had also been the President of the Court at the Grünwald trial, in which the Israeli government had sued Malkiel Grünwald for libel against Rezső (Rudolf) Kasztner. Famously, the trial ended with Halevi

87 “Eichmann magyarországi bűnei a jeruzsálemi bíróság előtt,” *Magyar Nemzet*, April 19, 1961.

88 “Tanúvallomás Eichmann budapesti gyilkosságáról,” *Népszabadság*, May 27, 1961.

89 “Eichmann további 29 bűntársát említi meg,” *Magyar Nemzet*, May 27, 1961. This episode was brought up during the proceedings to prove Eichmann’s direct responsibility in the commission of murder.



ruling that three out of the four charges were true, therefore not libellous. These were: collaboration with the Nazis; “indirect murder” or “preparing the ground for the murder” of Hungary’s Jews, and saving a war criminal (Kurt Becher) from punishment after the war.<sup>90</sup> The judge was also quoted as having said that Kasztner “sold his soul to the devil.”<sup>91</sup> The trial shook the Israeli public and led to the resignation of Prime Minister Moshe Sharett in 1955. The government appealed to the Supreme Court immediately after Halevi had read out the ruling. However, it took another three years for a new verdict, which overturned most of the judgment against Kasztner. On March 3, 1957, well before that judgement was released, Kasztner was shot, and he died two weeks later. To avoid the possibility of a similar scandal, witnesses who would have been too supportive or too inimical to Kasztner were not invited to testify at the Eichmann trial.<sup>92</sup> With the elimination of the Kasztner case, Hungarian propagandists lost their main angle for criticizing the Hungarian Zionist movement.

A comparison with Polish media coverage of the Eichmann trial helps provide a nuanced view of its presentation by the Hungarian press. Like the Hungarian, Polish media attempted to present the Holocaust in a manner that did not contradict the narrative of Polish victimhood by emphasizing the special significance of Poland in the Jewish genocide. *Trybuna Ludu* pointed out that

Polish territories have a special place in the history of the extermination of Jews. The very first acts of extermination were committed on Polish Jews. In the first phase of the criminal plan the persecutions were directed against both the non-Jewish and Jewish population of Poland.<sup>93</sup>

Yet according to the aforementioned report by B’nai B’rith, “[w]hile criticism of the current West German Government and its alleged links to Eichmann is to be found in the [Polish] press coverage, Jewish martyrdom is the dominant theme.”<sup>94</sup> Though the report has to be evaluated with consideration of its

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90 Akiva Orr, *Israel: Politics, Myths and Identity Crises* (London–Boulder, CO: Pluto Press, 1994), 83.

91 “ISRAEL: On Trial,” *Time Magazine*, July 11, 1955. Accessed July 25, 2011, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,807322-3,00.html>.

92 Neither Andreas Bliss nor Moshe Kraus, who both had relevant information with regards to the “Trucks for Blood” deal, was invited to testify, the former because it was believed he would try everything to clear Kasztner’s name, the latter for the opposite reason. See: Hanna Yablonka, *The State of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann* (New York: Schocken, 2004), 118–19.

93 “B’nai B’rith Report,” 247.

94 Ibid.

biases originating in the Cold War situation, other sources confirm this claim. A journalist named Kazimierz Kąkol covered the Eichmann trial for the paper “Law and Life” (*Prawo i Życie*), and a book based on his dispatches was published in 1962 under the title “Eichmann’s Road to Beit Ha’am” (*Adolfa Eichmanna droga do Beit Haam*). The publication sharply criticized the Israeli government’s way of conducting the trial and accused it of cooperation with the FRG, but it also pointed out the distinctiveness of the Jewish genocide.<sup>95</sup> Based on a rereading of various Polish literary and academic pieces of the period, social anthropologist Annamaria Orla-Bukowska also argued that, while these texts only reached a limited audience, “the Holocaust actually began to enter public discourse... in the wake of the Eichmann trial.”<sup>96</sup> Thus, Hungary was not the only country in the bloc where the Eichmann case opened up possibilities to acknowledge the Holocaust.

Perhaps more so than in Poland, however, the press in Hungary discussed Jewish victimhood without pairing it with a specific national tragedy narrative distinct from communist ideology. In Hungary, non-Jews who might have felt that they had suffered during the war were supposed to fit into one of two the categories: the working class or the communists. Those who did not consider themselves members of either of these two groups could not identify with the story of World War II presented by the Hungarian media.

### *Conclusions: Hungarian Policies, Propaganda and the Eichmann Case*

This paper has examined the trial of Adolf Eichmann and its presentation in the Hungarian press. Communist ideology’s anti-Fascism defined its stance as “anti-anti-Semitic,” yet the revolutionary commitment of Marxism-Leninism created a framework for an interpretation of World War II which conceptualized the conflict as one between two opposing, ideologically defined camps (fascists and anti-fascists). Consequently, it was difficult to accommodate the idea of non-political victimhood, i.e. the destruction of Jews based on racist ideas and not because of their political commitments. This represented a problem for communist propaganda during the Eichmann trial, a process that highlighted the destruction of Jews as the worst crime of the Nazi regime.

95 Anat Plocker, *Zionists to Dayan: The Anti-Zionist Campaign in Poland, 1967–1968* (PhD Thesis, Stanford University, 2009), 106.

96 Annamaria Orla-Bukowska, “Re-presenting the Shoah in Poland and Poland in the Shoah,” in *Re-presenting the Shoah for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Ronit Lentin (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 184.



Because of the Cold War situation, during which West Germany emerged as Communism's main "enemy" in Europe, bloc-wide attempts to control the interpretation of the trial focused on the perpetrators, whom they hoped to connect with the government of the FRG. The identity of the victims was a secondary question—and this led to the relativization of Jewish victimhood—yet it was not actively suppressed.

Despite János Kádár's speech at the Politburo, in which he warned against emphasizing the Jewish theme, Hungarian press reports *during* the trial repeatedly revealed who the primary victims of Nazi persecution had been. The trial's thematization of Eichmann's activities during World War II and eyewitness accounts about Hungary made such revelations rather difficult for the Hungarian press to avoid. This was all the more so because some elements of the story that emerged in the Jerusalem courtroom did not contradict or hamper the goals of the Hungarian leadership. Eichmann was judged guilty even before his trial had begun, both in Israel<sup>97</sup> and in Hungary. The Hungarian witnesses carefully chosen by the Israeli court described, in great detail, the "cruelty of the Germans,"<sup>98</sup> just as communist propaganda emphasized the brutality of Fascism. Thus, acknowledgement of Jewish victimhood as presented during the trial of Adolf Eichmann, however limited, allowed for the surfacing of at least a partial Holocaust narrative in Hungary: the trial effectively brought knowledge of the Holocaust to the broader Hungarian public through the coverage that was given in numerous major newspapers.

The possible reasons for the emergence of this partial Holocaust narrative could be found in various factors. The lack of a considerable anti-fascist resistance movement and widespread anti-Bolshevik sentiments among the population during the 1940s made the communist anti-fascist narrative completely incongruous with details of Hungarian history that were revealed at the trial. The Israeli court's effective control over what was being said in the courtroom made it nearly impossible for the Hungarian journalists who were present at the trial *not* to present Jews as the primary targets of Nazi extermination policies.

Just as the Polish state instrumentalized Auschwitz as a political site of memory for World War II, the Hungarian regime attempted to use the Eichmann trial to strengthen (indirectly) its narrative of 1956. The Kádár administration, in particular, wanted to focus on the perpetrators to showcase "fascist elements"

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97 Hanna Yablonka, *The State of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann* (New York: Schocken, 2004), 121, 141.

98 *Ibid.*, 120.

in society that, according to its narrative, had been responsible both for many wartime deaths and for the 1956 revolution. This propaganda goal was apparent especially during the months *prior* to the trial, when the historical account of World War II in Hungary was a frequently recurring theme in the Hungarian press. The wartime governments' discriminatory actions were frequently depicted as targeting communists and the working class in general. The extensive use of the term "fascist" effectively diluted its meaning (which came to signify anyone opposed to communist policies) and prevented a meaningful discussion of the sources of anti-Semitic policies in Hungary during the Horthy period. As the deportation of Jews was blamed on a few in power, any discussion of the behavior of broader segments of Hungarian society was hindered. These Kádárist policies infantilized the public and suggested that social norms against anti-Semitism were relative or even inconsequential.

Despite its obvious omissions and distortions, the Kádár regime's critique of the Hungarian government's behavior during the last part of the war brought important points to light. Members of the Hungarian state administration were not "fascists," but they bore responsibility for the extermination of the country's Jews. The Kádárist narrative tried to incorporate the Holocaust into Hungarian history (rather than just treating it as part of Jewish or German history), but also tried to frame the anti-Semitism of the period as an element of Fascism and something that the communists had defeated, both in 1945 and 1956. This narrative may be ideologically loaded, but it should not be dismissed as complete fiction, much less as entirely tabooizing the Holocaust.

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*Beszélő*

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